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- (1) Editorial: Yokota airspace must be returned to Japan

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 5) (Full)
September 20, 2006

Talks on returning air traffic control over the Yokota airspace, now held by US forces in Japan, are now in the final stretch in connection with a project to expand Haneda Airport and the agreement on realignment of US forces in Japan. Japan must win back sovereignty over its skies so that aircraft can fly more freely.

The postwar era is not totally over for Japanese skies. Flights from Haneda Airport bound for the Kita-kyushu, Chugoku, or Hokuriku region have to ascend sharply over Tokyo Bay to head for the west to

fly over the huge "air wall" stretching from the Izu Peninsula to Niigata Prefecture.

Talks have repeatedly been conducted in the postwar period to discuss returning the Yokota airspace, a step-like airspace straddling over Tokyo and eight neighboring prefectures. Under the airspace sit the Yokota, Atsugi, and Iruma bases. Because the airspace is restricted to US military aircraft, any civilian plane that wants to enter the space must obtain permission from US forces in advance.

The ongoing talks were prompted by the project to expand Haneda Airport to meet growing passenger demand. The number of annual flights to and from Haneda Airport will increase from the current 296,000 to 407,000 when its fourth runway is completed at the end of fiscal 2009.

An additional 2,500-meter runway at Narita Airport is also scheduled to be operational in the spring of 2010, pushing up the number of annual flights to and from the airport from the current 200,000 to 220,000.

The Land, Infrastructure and Transport Ministry conducted talks with the US in close cooperation with the Foreign Ministry and the Defense Agency, seeking a total return of the Yokota airspace initially. As a result, the two countries managed to produce a US force realignment final report specifying that: (1) air traffic control over the Yokota airspace shall be partially returned to Japan by September 2008; and (2) airspace subject to reversion shall be determined by October 2006.

The two countries decided to continue discussing a total return of the airspace, however. This forced the Transport Ministry to call

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for a deep cut in the Yokota airspace, a pragmatic response. The civilian aviation industry is also watching attentively to what extent the US will reduce its Yokota airspace.

Even a partial return of the airspace is expected to increase flight safety, reducing near-miss accidents, flight times, fuel consumption, and carbon dioxide emissions.

The challenges of reversion of airspace control involve the Yokota base in Tokyo, the Iwakuni base in Yamaguchi, and the Kadena base in Okinawa. Of them, airspace control at Kadena Air Base is set to be returned to Japan by the end of fiscal 2007. Japanese air traffic controllers are undergoing training.

The question of returning airspace is closely associated with security. Special airspace must be dissolved. The government must work harder to regain sovereignty over skies once and for all.

Sept. 20 falls on Air Day, which evolved from Aviation Day, designated in 1940 in commemoration of Japan's first powered flight. Japan's defeat in WWII disrupted the tradition. The tradition came back to life in the new name in 1992, the 40th anniversary of resumed civilian aviation. Let us resolve the longstanding airspace issue so that we can celebrate the anniversary wholeheartedly.

(2) Itokazu decides to run in Okinawa gubernatorial election; US force realignment to be top issue in campaign

OKINAWA TIMES (Page 2) (Excerpts)
September 20, 2006

(Commentary)

Six opposition parties have decided to jointly field House of Councillors member Keiko Itokazu, 58, in the Okinawa gubernatorial election. In a press briefing to announce her candidacy yesterday, Itokazu stressed her opposition to constructing new facilities, including one to relocate the US Marine Corp's Futenma Air Station to a coastal area of Camp Schwab. In the Nov. 19 election, the candidates backed by the ruling and opposition camps will engage in one-on-one fight, centered on the propriety of the realignment of US

forces in Japan. Although the campaign period is extremely short, the work to lay down basic policies for Itokazu has yet to start. In the opposition camp, there are wide differences in views on the Japan-United States security arrangements, the Self-Defense Force (SDF), and national security. The opposition parties are urged to coordinate views quickly.

Asked about why she decided to accept the request, Itokazu emphatically said in a press conference:

"If a person who tolerates plans to build new bases in the realignment of US forces in Japan is elected as Okinawa governor, the prefecture's future will be in danger. ... I am opposed to all decisions that could lead to war. I am determined to convey to the governments of Japan and the United States Okinawan residents' views on the base issue that will be affected by the governor's stance."

The six opposition parties share basic views, including opposition to constructing new military bases in the process of realigning US forces in Japan. For Itokazu, who was involved in the anti-war peace movement and later became a politician, her position on the base issue is a nonnegotiable political item. In order to obtain support

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from Tokunobu (?) Yamauchi, 71, who declined candidacy, and others, she cannot allow herself to compromise in that policy stance.

Even so, if Itokazu has a strong reformist flavor, supporters of Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan) may step back from her.

Following Itokazu's decision to run in the election, Sozo gave up fielding its president, Mikio Shimoji, 45, as its candidate. A party member said: "Now that President Shimoji has dropped his candidacy, all six parties can back Itokazu."

(3) Itokazu to officially declare candidacy on Sept. 23 in Okinawa gubernatorial election in response to request from six parties, with opposition to Futenma coastal relocation plan

OKINAWA Times (Page 1) (Full)
September 20, 2006

House of Councillors member Keiko Itokazu, 58, declared her candidacy yesterday as a contender jointly backed by six opposition parties in the Okinawa gubernatorial election set for Nov. 19. The six parties are the Social Democratic Party; Okinawa Shakai Taishuto (Okinawa Social Mass Party); the Japanese Communist Party; Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan); the Liberal League; and Sozo (Imagination). Itokazu, also deputy chief of Okinawa Shakai Taishuto (Okinawa Social Mass Party), said: "I really feel the responsibility of my role, and it is having a bracing effect on me. I would like to stride toward victory and regain the helm of the prefectural administration from the ruling camp." She expects to officially announce her candidacy on Sept. 23.

With the slogan of "pursuing a peaceful prefectural administration," Itokazu takes the stance of opposing the controversial plan to relocate the US Marine Corp's Futenma Air Station to a coastal area of Camp Schwab. This plan is included in the final report on the realignment of US forces in Japan. She will try to win support from the prefecture's residents by setting forth the debate over the coastal plan as the central issue in the campaign.

Upon expressing her opposition to the coastal plan, Itokazu said: "If a person who tolerates the plan is elected as Okinawa governor, the future of Okinawa will be exposed to risk. In order to defend our lives and livelihood, I would like to convey Okinawan residents' feelings to both the Japanese and United States governments."

Asked why she decided to run in the election while in office as a member of the House of Councillors, Itokazu replied: "Looking back over the past elections, it is apparent that unless we band together, it will be impossible to win a victory. Receiving the request from the six opposition parties to field a unified candidate, I felt a great sense of mission." She added: "I expect that arrangements will be made for the parties to take joint steps

and make utmost efforts."

After the political party Sozo, headed by Mikio Shimoji, decided to support Itokazu, its representative said: "It is necessary to explain in the general meeting planned for Sept. 22 about why our party also support the candidate fielded jointly by other five parties." But he added: "Ms. Itokazu has not presented her policy stance. It is necessary to take time to look into how we should support her."

Prior to presenting the request to Itokazu, the six opposition

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parties confirmed that they would remain unwavering in their basic stance, including opposition to the Camp Schwab coastal plan. A decision was made for Okinawa Shakai Taishuto to take charge of making arrangements for joint struggle. The chairman of the supporters' group for Itokazu said: "Since this is a quick campaign, each day is important. We would like to form a united front to regain the helm of the prefectural political power."

(4) Revision to Money Lending Control Law reveals foreign companies are eating into Japan's consumer financing

SHUKAN SHINCHO (Page 38)
September 28, 2006

The issue of revising the Money Lending Control Law has drawn public attention in various ways due in part to lawmaker Masazumi Gotoda's resignation as Cabinet Office parliamentary secretary. After much furor, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has decided to lower the special-exception interest rate from 28 PERCENT to 25.5 PERCENT and cut short a period in which interest rates topping the level are allowed under the Interest Rate Limit Law from the original nine years to five years. A political news section reporter of this weekly magazine noted: "With an eye on the Lower House by-elections in October and next year's Upper House election, Policy Research Council Chairman Hidenao Nakagawa managed to reach a settlement. However, the high interest rate will remain in place for five years. The settlement was like a cross between intra-party arguments for and against the existence of interest rates topping the level allowed under the law."

Will this legislation really settle the multiple debts issue? The venue of deliberations on thorny issues, such as the link between suicides of borrowers insured by lenders and the cause of such suicides, will shift to the extraordinary Diet session.

The extended furor has revealed clearly the existence of pressure from foreign companies.

A financial journalist said: "Several organizations representing US financial institutions have applied pressure on the Financial Services Agency (FSA). For instance, the Financial Services Forum (FSF) formed by 20 US leading financial institutions sent a letter to FSA Director General Kaoru Yosano, urging him not to place a cap on interest rates, as it will lead to the proliferation of loan sharks. The letter also noted that they also sent copies to a US under secretary and assistant secretary at the Treasury Department.

They did this because US companies now have become a formidable presence in Japan's consumer financing market. The same journalist added:

"Of the seven leading consumer financing companies in Japan, Citigroup-affiliated CFJ ranks fifth, followed by GE Capital. These two companies are members of the FSF. Unlike the saturated credit industry, consumer financing is a lucrative business area for them. Furthermore, some foreign companies have stake in Japanese consumer financing companies, even though they are not directly engaging in this business. As such, the issue this time was somebody else's affair for them."

It is not unusual to see blue-eyed loan sharks in Japan these days.

(5) Kagefumi Ueno named ambassador to Vatican

SANKEI (Page 2) (Full)
September 13, 2006

The government decided at a cabinet meeting on Sept. 12 to appoint Kagefumi Ueno, a managing director of the Japan International Training Cooperation Organization (JITCO), to serve as ambassador to Vatican, and other ambassadors. The appointments were formally announced the same day.

Shinichi Kitaoka, who was appointed as deputy permanent representative of Japan to the United Nations in April 2004, is to return to the University of Tokyo as of Sept. 13.

Ambassador to Vatican Kagefumi Ueno: Graduated from the University of Tokyo; entered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) in 1972; served as managing director of the JITC since February 2004, after having served as ambassador to Guatemala; age 58; born in Tokyo.

Ambassador to Tanzania Makoto Ito: Graduated from Nagoya University; entered MOFA in 1972; served as consul general at Detroit since March 2003, after serving as director general of the External Affairs (the name of which was changed to protocol chief in August 2003) of the Metropolitan government; age 57; born in Aichi Prefecture.

Ambassador to Jamaica and to Bahamas and Belize Masahiro Obata: Graduated from Chuo University; entered MOFA in 1968; served as consul general at Kota Kinabalu since March 2004, after serving deputy chief of protocol; age 60; born in Niigata Prefecture.

SCHIEFFER